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ABSTRACT

This publication is based on the session on assessment of prior learning and the accrediting process at the 1991 National Institute on the Assessment of Experiential Learning. The paper by Paula Hooper Mayhew focuses on regional accreditation, including the evaluation team visit and accrediting prior learning assessment during the visit. Amy K. Lezberg's presentation discusses the background of accreditation in New England and then deals specifically with prior learning assessment in New England, including the role of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education in accreditation, makeup of the commission, and accreditation of prior learning assessment. The presentation of Gerald W. Patton addresses the four criteria for accreditation: (1) the institution has clear and publicly stated purposes, consistent with its mission and appropriate to a postsecondary educational institution; (2) the institution has effectively organized adequate human, financial, and physical resources into educational and other programs to accomplish its purposes; (3) the institution is accomplishing its purposes; and (4) the institution can continue to accomplish its purposes. (YLB)

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ED 387 611

THE ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING AND THE ACCREDITING PROCESS

Proceedings of the National Institute on the Assessment of Experiential Learning

June 9-12, 1991

Sponsored by Thomas Edison State College, in cooperation with CAEL

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FACULTY OF THE INSTITUTE

Debra A. Dagavarian, Director of the Institute
Dr. Debra A. Dagavarian is the director of Testing and Assessment at Thomas Edison State College. Throughout her years in higher education as an administrator, consultant and faculty member, she has developed a strong commitment to serving the adult learner. Formerly assistant dean for assessment at Empire State College, she also has been director of evening programs and director of academic advising at Mercy College. She holds a Doctorate in Education from Rutgers University. Among Dr. Dagavarian's publications are three books on children's baseball fiction.

Harriet W. Cabell
Dr. Harriet W. Cabell is the associate dean and director of New College/ External Degree Program, the University of Alabama. Speaker, trainer, educator and consultant, she has conducted programs nationwide and abroad for over 60 colleges, universities and professional organizations. Her training sessions focus on relevant, practical skills and techniques in a variety of areas including the philosophy and implication of prior learning programs, curricular issues and the management of adult learning programs. Dr. Cabell is certified as an Educational Specialist and holds a Doctoral degree from the University of Alabama.

Ross Ann Craig
Dr. Ross Ann Craig is the vice president for Student Development at Delaware County Community College. She has developed and conducted a variety of workshops in adult development and assertiveness, and is a certified trainer in the Student Potential Program of CAEL. She has trained assessors working with students in the U.S. and Great Britain and has presented papers to a number of national and local professional groups, including the American Personnel and Guidance Association. Dr. Craig holds a Master's degree in Education from the University of Florida, a Doctoral degree in Education from Nova University and is a licensed psychologist.

Thomas F. Donlon
Dr. Thomas F. Donlon, the director of Test Development and Research at Thomas Edison State College, is a specialist in educational measurement with emphasis on test development and on related research. He has served on the staffs of The Psychological Corporation and Educational Testing Service. His interest in adult education was stimulated by his service, while at ETS, for the Carnegie-funded project which led to the creation of CAEL. He received a J.D. degree in 1981 and practices law. He is interested in a variety of problems relating to the intersection of education and law.

Paul I. Jacobs
Dr. Paul I. Jacobs, former director of Test Development and Research at Thomas Edison State College, has been involved for 15 years in helping adult students demonstrate what they have learned through out-of-school experiences. He has organized and conducted numerous workshops, produced and edited written materials on behalf of CAEL, and served on a CAEL team to train educators in Quebec. Dr. Jacobs has also organized workshops on math anxiety, thinking skills, problem solving and creativity, and has served as an educational consultant to the governments of India and Israel. He is currently writing and consulting, and producing and performing comedy.

Morris T. Keeton
Dr. Morris T. Keeton is the director of the Institute for Research on Adults in Higher Education (IRAHE), University of Maryland, University College. Formerly chief executive officer of CAEL from 1977 through 1989, he served as chair of the steering committee of the original CAEL when it was a project of the Educational Testing Service in the mid-1970s. Dr. Keeton was a member of the faculty and administrative staff of Antioch College from 1947-1977, where he served as professor of Philosophy, College pastor, dean of the faculty, academic vice president, provost and vice president and acting president. He holds a B.A. and an M.A. in Philosophy from Southern Methodist University, and an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Harvard University. Dr. Keeton also has been listed in *Who's Who in America* since 1969.

Amy K. Lezberg
Dr. Amy K. Lezberg is associate director of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education at the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Formerly professor of English and associate dean for Academic Affairs at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences, her responsibilities included faculty and curriculum evaluation and development. Presently, she selects and trains evaluation teams for New England's 200 institutions of higher learning. Dr. Lezberg, who holds a Ph.D. in English from Boston University, has presented and published papers on professional ethics, interpersonal/ intercultural communication and ethnic literature.

Alan Mandell
Dr. Alan Mandell is associate dean at Empire State College, State University of New York. Over the last 15 years, he has served as a faculty member working with adults in the social sciences and history, and as an administrator in the Empire State College program in Hartsdale, N.Y. Dr. Mandell is coauthor, along with Elana Michelson, of the CAEL publication, *Portfolio Development and Adult Learning: Purposes and Strategies*, and also edits *Kairos: A Journal of Social-Cultural Criticism*. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the City University of New York.

Paula Hooper Mayhew
Dr. Paula Hooper Mayhew is associate director of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. A former academic dean at Empire State College, she currently serves the Commission as the assessment and evaluation specialist for four-year colleges and research universities. A graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University, she received her Ph.D. in English Literature from Princeton University, where she completed a dissertation on narrative theory. She is coauthor of a study on the women's college in the 1970s and has published articles in the field of women's studies administration and women's literature.

Gerald W. Patton
Dr. Gerald W. Patton is associate director of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Formerly an assistant dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and director of the African and AfroAmerican Studies Program at Washington University in St. Louis, he has served as a field reader for the U.S. Office of Education and is a consultant on urban education. Dr. Patton holds the Ph.D. degree in history from the University of Iowa. He is the author of *War and Race: The Black Officer in the American Military 1915-1941, and* editor of *A Framework for Racial Justice, an Agenda for the 1980's St. Louis.*

Barry G. Sheckley
Dr. Barry G. Sheckley is associate professor at the University of Connecticut in the Adult and Vocational Education Program. He serves as CAEL research associate, has directed four CAEL Institutes and was CAEL's regional manager in New England for ten years. Dr. Sheckley's recent research has been in the area of adult and experiential learning, his current research on workplace learning. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut and conducted dissertation research on adult learning projects. Dr. Sheckley describes himself as an "aging, long-distance marathon runner."

Urban Whitaker
Dr. Urban Whitaker has long been involved in experiential learning and career development. He has served as practitioner, teacher and administrator in cooperative education and other experiential learning programs at San Francisco State University since 1969. He has developed materials in a number of media (print, tape, slide, software) on the learning and assessment of career-transferable skills, and is the author of *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles and Procedures.* Dr. Whitaker, who holds a Ph.D. from the University of Washington, has consulted for numerous colleges and has performed multiple roles for CAEL: author, member of the Board of Directors, regional manager, presenter.

The National Institute on the Assessment of Experiential Learning: Assessment of Prior Learning and the Accrediting Process

In June 1991, the third annual National Institute on the Assessment of Experiential Learning was held. Sponsored by Thomas Edison State College, in cooperation with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), the National Institute is an opportunity for professionals interested in the theory and practice of experiential learning assessment to come together and learn from one another. It is held in a retreat setting at the Henry Chauncey Conference Center of the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, NJ.

National Institute participants range from college deans and program directors who are just beginning to consider offering a prior learning assessment program at their institutions, to faculty and administrators who have long been involved in the assessment of experiential learning. Professionals from the U.S. and Canada attended the National Institute in 1991, and interest is expected to grow in future years.

The Faculty of the National Institute are experts in the field. These individuals actually have shaped the practice of experiential learning assessment throughout the years. Educators such as Drs. Morris Keeton, Urban Whitaker, Harriet Cabell, Barry Sheckley, Alan Mandell and others make up the core of the faculty. You can get a sense of how these people have determined the direction of experiential learning assessment by reading their biographies on the inside cover of this booklet.

Each year, the National Institute on the Assessment of Experiential Learning produces a publication. This publication is based on the session titled "Assessment of Prior Learning and the Accrediting Process." The panel was chaired by Dr. Paula Hooper Mayhew of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Higher Education, and included Dr. Amy K. Lezberg of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, and Dr. Gerald W. Patton of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Dr. Debra A. Dagavarian
Director of the National Institute

Dr. Paula Hooper Mayhew, Associate Director
The Middle States Commission on Higher Education

I always enjoy my work as a faculty member in the Institute. It gives me the opportunity to work with my old friend and colleague, Dr. Dagavarian, and with my newer friends and colleagues, Dr. Amy Lezberg of the New England regional accrediting body and Dr. Gerald Patton of North Central. Being among educators with an interest in nontraditional education is always stimulating, as well. Thank you for having me here.

An overview of regional accreditation

Amy, Gerald and I are among a handful of professional staff members who are employees of our respective regional accrediting bodies. The six regional accrediting bodies are overseen by Commissioners who are not paid for their work and act much like collegiate Boards of Trustees in supervising the whole process of institutional accreditation and assuming legal responsibility for the outcomes. The actual accreditation evaluations — the team visits and team reports — are performed and reported on by colleagues working from self-studies written by the institutions under reaccreditation evaluation. The whole process is known as "self-study and peer review" and is thus distinguishable from state or federal regulation of higher education.

This process of self-study and peer review sets the United States apart from other countries in Western Europe and on the Pacific rim which boast ministries of education that set nationwide standards for higher education. The American method of evaluation emphasizes the individual missions and goals of the college or university under review; in other countries, regulation tends over time to create standardized expectations for institutional effectiveness. Our system encourages wide participation in higher education at all levels by a large segment of the population. In England, for example, the track to higher education is relatively narrow and the process of excluding "inferior" students begins in the early grades. Only 11 per cent of the population is eligible for entry into the university system, a process that assures, over time, the creation of an intellectual meritocracy.

In the Middle States region, which encompasses New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, regional accreditors look at the whole teaching and learning environment, not just at academic programs. We have become well-known (notorious?) for our interest in the development of the whole student and in the creation of supportive campus climates for students and professors alike. Despite allegations to the contrary, we do not advocate quotas of any kind and have never endorsed any particular curricular formation. We have, however, always encouraged experimentation and innovation and supported nontraditional education in its many forms.

The evaluation team visit

Our evaluation teams are chosen to "fit" the college or university they will visit. Usually, the team numbers 10 or 12 people, but some large universities or complex organizations require more. As staff members, Amy, Gerald and I choose the team chairs and members in consultation with the presidents of the institutions under review. In developing teams, we try to determine what the issues are on the campus at the time and what the major problems or concerns seem to be. If your college or university's self-study is not much concerned with adult or nontraditional education, chances are that your visiting team will not include an evaluator for whom those are areas of special expertise.

Because I believe that most colleges and universities tend to isolate their nontraditional programs and students and provide them with insufficient resources, I often counsel adult educators on campuses to volunteer early for the institutional self-study committee to be sure that adult and nontraditional programs are not overlooked. The more that the self-study addresses these areas, the more reasonable it is to have a nontraditional educator/specialist on the team.

Why, you might ask, would one want an outsider to scrutinize one's already marginalized nontraditional programs, especially ones that offer credit for prior college-level learning? You might choose, instead, to hide out, let yourself be overlooked and hope the reaccreditation goes well for the institution as a whole. A better choice, from my point of view, is to try to get the self-study to give appropriate space to adult and nontraditional programs (often, students in these programs constitute a large proportion of the student body) and to make sure that the visitors give them similar regard. There are few better routes toward the legitimization of nontraditional programs in your college and university and, in my experience, legitimization and improved status — to say nothing of resources — go hand in hand.

Accrediting prior learning assessment during the visit

As you know, the American university system is undergoing a real sea change in the wake of the revitalized outcomes assessment movement. (Middle States has produced a "Framework for Outcomes Assessment" that you can request from our office at 3624 Market St., Philadelphia, PA 19104). As a useful component of institutional outcomes assessment, portfolio assessment has been discovered by even the most conservative of educators. For this reason, you and your skills as evaluators of prior college-level learning are, for the first time, moving to center stage. (The author of one of the best books on portfolio assessment, Dr. Alan Mandell, is here with us today. His book, coauthored by Elana Michelson, is entitled, *"Portfolio Development and Adult Learning: Purposes and Strategies,"* and is available from CAEL, at 223 West Jackson, Suite 510, Chicago, IL 60606.)

Even if you have not been successful in highlighting your activities in the self-study, this new-found interest in outcomes assessment may make you and your programs the subject of interest to evaluators who are *not* expert in your areas, people who can give you 20 minutes or so on their way to evaluating other things. So, you have to be prepared to be reassuring about the quality and rigor of your methods, to act bright and cheerful, and to explain prior learning assessment in the simplest way possible. (Usually using a sample student portfolio heavy on direct course equivalents is the easiest way.)

On the other hand, if you *have* been successful in highlighting your programs in the self-study and have an expert evaluator assigned to you for a significant amount of time during the visit, you should use that person as you would a consultant, asking for and obtaining a good outside view of your work. Besides the time spent evaluating your actual programs, you should make sure that this evaluator looks into the perceptions that the rest of the community, especially the faculty, have of your program. He or she will be happy to address in the final report, whatever misperceptions or misrepresentations are adversely effecting the program's welfare.

In sum, let me say that I believe the kinds of methods you will be learning and refining here at the Institute are exactly the ones that will make your re-accreditation evaluation visit a success. Prior learning assessment, within the context of overall institutional outcomes assessment, is of topical and ongoing interest. I wish you all the best.

Dr. Amy K. Lezberg, Associate Director
The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
at the New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Background of accreditation in New England

Before dealing specifically with prior learning assessment in New England, it might be most worthwhile to discuss the forces which shape accreditation in New England higher education as a whole. New England is home to a number of nationally known private institutions of higher education which draw their clientele from throughout the United States and, primarily at the undergraduate level, from among the traditional aged student population, those 17 to 21 year olds who have most recently attended secondary school. Even in these fiscally troubled times, some of these institutions are so sufficiently convinced of the uniqueness of their mission and approach that they accept virtually no transfer students from other institutions and virtually no nontraditional students, except, occasionally, through named programs (e.g., the Sophia Snow Scholars at Smith). Indeed, at some of them, a junior year abroad is actually a year without college credit, though they might help arrange such a year and would perhaps express little doubt that the experience was educationally as well as socially and culturally worthwhile.

Such traditional institutions are strongly supportive of the private quality control represented by regional accreditation. Currently represented on the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, for example, are representatives of such private institutions as Bates, Bradford, Dartmouth, Smith, Tufts, Lasell, Brandeis and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

New England is also home to institutions of a more nontraditional nature, institutions with missions geared to the needs of particular populations, some of which were seriously underserved in the past. Such an institution is Burlington College of Vermont, which promotes community-based education for previously underserved populations and whose president is also a member of the Commission.

Rounding out the Commission's 17 members are representatives from the public sector of higher education, including two community colleges, one state college, one land-grant university and one system chancellor, and two representatives of the public interest who have no formal affiliation with the New England institutions being accredited.

The Commission's role in accreditation

Because New England is a comparatively small region of the country, comprising only six states and 200 institutions, all accreditation decisions are considered by the total Commission. Also because of the size of the region, we are able to tailor each team to the particular needs of the college being visited — rural or urban, independent or public, community college or research institution, highly selective or open admission.

In 1990, for example, the Commission sent out approximately 40 teams. Half were conducting comprehensive evaluations, assessing institutions against the full array of the standards. Evaluation teams review all aspects of an institution — not only the qualifications of its faculty and the nature of its programs and library holdings, but also its fiscal strength, student support services and co-curricular activities, and overall institutional integrity. In each case, they want to discover the degree to which the individual elements of the institution are both guided by and supportive of the institution's overall educational mission.

The others were conducting focused evaluation visits, looking at areas of particular interest to the Commission, either because they represented areas of concern from a previous comprehensive evaluation or because there had been some substantive change in the institution in the interim since the last comprehensive visit (e.g., a change in governance, the receipt of state permission to offer a degree at a higher level than previously).

Make-up of the Commission

In addition to institutional fit as mentioned above, we try to assure an appropriate balance on the team (which usually has between eight and ten members) between experienced and new evaluators, administrators and faculty, and usually include a student service person and a librarian. When an institution has a substantial program in prior learning assessment, we also include on the team someone with experience in that area — among those who have served on teams for the New England Association, for example, are Debra Dagavarian and Barry Sheckley. The final consideration in team makeup evolves from seeking a balance among the team members in terms of gender and ethnicity appropriate to the visit.

Full-time employees of accredited institutions become team members in a variety of ways: they are recommended to us by experienced evaluators, institution presidents, current and former commissioners, and others familiar with the work of the Commission. The three professional staff members of the Commission conduct workshops and visits to institutions as they engage in the self-study process, and we keep our eyes open for enthusiastic, knowledgeable members of self-study committees whom we meet on these occasions. Those of you who wish to serve on such committees should make that desire known to any of the above groups and should make your interest manifest not only by speaking to your president but by participating in the self-study.

Accreditation of prior learning assessment

For those involved in prior learning assessment it is particularly important to be proactive in this regard, because except in such institutions as Cambridge College, Empire State College or Thomas Edison State College, you may not be internally perceived as central to the institutional mission. There is a real irony in this as institutions and the entire higher education community begin to increase their emphasis on the assessment of learning outcomes throughout the academy as a sign of educational effectiveness, the buzz word of the nineties. You who are involved in prior learning assessment have been helping individuals define and analyze the educational outcomes of their life experiences, and your knowledge could be put to good use in the accreditation process.

During a visit for reaffirmation in accreditation, the team will look for documentary evidence related to both the process and product of your work. For example, we will wish to be sure that administrative pressures to maintain or increase enrollment do not undermine the academic considerations involved in granting prior learning assessment credit. We will want to know who is in charge of the program and the degree to which faculty participate in and accept your work. Since accreditation is, by its nature, a sampling technique, we will also wish to see examples of the work for which credit has been granted and will want to know how students given such credit have fared in their career at the institution. The basic questions and concerns are the same for each element in an institution — does it flow from and support the mission of the institution, does it have adequate resources to carry out its task, does it seem likely that it will continue to carry out its task in the foreseeable future, and

does the institution assess the effectiveness of the process and use the results of its assessment to enhance its ability to meet its mission?

Beyond the immediate concern of an individual institution's self-study and evaluation, those involved in prior learning assessment should keep abreast of the activities of their regional accreditation association. Like the others, we have a policy which limits prior learning assessment credit to the undergraduate level. If you believe such a policy is overly limiting, you should inform yourself as to the reason for it and only then attempt to refute such reasons. Since a general concern about all prior learning assessment relates to the students' understanding of the theoretical basis for their knowledge, you should document the degree to which such knowledge is imparted. In general, we in New England have felt most comfortable with the guidelines and procedures promulgated by CAEL. But we also require that the implementation of procedures included in such guidelines be carefully documented. Any attempt to change the regionals' needs to be assured regarding the adequacy of control and resources and implementation of a successful program in prior learning assessment must be well-supported by the program's results, in terms of meeting the educational objectives of the institution.

All of this is to say that accreditation is about accountability and, just as you provide outside validation of the educational accomplishments of the noncollege-based learning experiences of your students, we provide outside validation of the educational effectiveness of institutions as a whole.

Dr. Gerald W. Patton, Associate Director
The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

Criteria for accreditation

The North Central Association lists four criteria for accreditation: the institution has clear and publicly stated purposes, consistent with its mission and appropriate to a postsecondary educational institution; the institution has effectively organized adequate human, financial and physical resources into educational and other programs to accomplish its purposes; the institution is accomplishing its purposes; and the institution can continue to accomplish its purposes.

If an institution has an experiential learning program or is interested in starting such a program, we provide in the "Combined Data Evaluation Form" (CDEF) a guide to assess the quality of the program. This guide is used as a resource as the institution prepares its self-study and is grounded in the criteria for accreditation. The self-study is an appropriate place to delineate a philosophy and a plan of implementation for assessing experiential learning.

Institutional mission

The first criterion, when applied to experiential learning assessment programs, asks to what extent the goals and objectives of the activities or program(s) of experiential learning are consistent with the mission and purposes of the institution. Is credit for experiential learning offered only in areas where the institution is competent to judge quality? Are the objectives of the activities and program(s) of experiential learning clearly defined? And finally, to what extent does the institution award experiential credit in off-campus educational settings but not on campus, and how does it justify the practice?

Organization and resources

The second criterion focuses on the extent to which the organization, resources and systems to control for results are satisfactory. To what extent is the administration of the activities and program(s) of experiential learning properly organized to carry out the stated objectives? Are there clear decision-making patterns and lines of authority? To what extent does the institution provide for policy councils to establish policies and monitor adherence in experiential learning programs similar to councils operative in the traditional curriculum, that is with faculty playing a dominant role (faculty and administration accountability expectations, staff concerned that faculty control the process as opposed to overutilization of "outside experts")? To what extent is there appropriate codification and publication of all policies and procedures relating to the administration, assessment, counseling and other aspects of experiential programs?

With regard to the nature of the student clientele, at issue is the extent to which student abilities and characteristics are congruent with institutional expectations for successful completion of courses and/or degree programs. It is important, as well, to ask what financial resources are available to attain the stated objectives, and to what extent the institution provides an adequate counseling and advising system for students and clientele (prior to admission for students in prior learning programs and during the regular session for students in sponsored learning programs).

Accomplishing institutional objectives

The third criterion for accreditation deals with whether or not the institution is accomplishing its purposes with respect to experiential learning programs. The institution must determine to what extent the curriculum and degree process supports the development and maintenance of high quality experiential education programs; whether they have identified the types of learning competencies for which they will award credit; whether they provide clear guidelines as to what they consider college-level learning; whether a differentiation is made between learning and experience, and credit is awarded only for learning; and whether the learning outcomes are detailed with sufficient clarity and specificity so they can be communicated to students and assessors and be validly assessed. When credit is awarded on the basis of an assessment of experiential learning, is it clearly identified in terms of the level at which it is awarded (e.g., lower division — freshman, sophomore; upper division — junior, senior)? In the award of experiential learning credit, is care taken to assure that students will meet all degree requirements (e.g., general education, lower division and upper division requirements)? Can the institution provide a clear rationale for crediting particular types of learning or competencies for particular degree, diploma or certificate programs? Does the institution have clear policies as to what types of documentation are required for evaluating learning and what function such documentation is intended to serve? Has the expertise of assessors been verified, is the role of faculty dominant in the documentation process, are multiple forms of documentation required and is the documentation appropriate to the learning and competence being evaluated?

Next, it must be determined whether the institution employs appropriate methods of measurement to assess experiential learning. Again, to be noted are the expertise of assessors, the role of faculty, whether multiple forms are employed and whether the modes of assessment are appropriate to the competence and learning being credited. Are there appropriate review procedures for program development? Is the basis for translating learning outcomes into credit hours specified? Is credit of learning recorded appropriately and in a manner appropriate to the learning?

Continuation of accomplishing institutional goals

The final major criterion centers on whether the institution can continue to accomplish its purposes concerning experiential learning programs. Is planning for the future of experiential learning programs ongoing and realistically directed toward the problems and opportunities that may be encountered by the institution, and are the decisions effecting experiential learning programs wise and appropriate to the institution?

Institutions with or interested in starting prior learning programs should consider the following: the experiential learning program(s) and activities are effectively organized to accomplish their goals and objectives; the experiential learning program(s) and activities are adequate to accomplish their goals and objectives; the institution is accomplishing its goals and objectives concerning experiential learning programs and activities; and the institution can continue to accomplish the goals and objectives of the experiential learning programs.

Some Final Thoughts From the Director

The field of prior learning assessment is undergoing a renaissance of sorts, one which has centered on standards, quality assurance and outcomes assessment. After having been nascent in its present forms for about 20 years, prior learning assessment has come of age. Maturity has brought an emphasis on high quality, and the work of accreditation reviews reflects this.

Institutional self-study for accreditation or re-accreditation review can act as an impetus for an institution's ongoing research. Integrated into such research should be an ongoing review of prior learning assessment. It is important to create and sustain a prior learning assessment program which supports not only its students, but the faculty and institution as well. Clearly, institutional mission, goals and objectives must be defined before determining the efficacy of such a program.

As is evident from the presentations of Drs. Mayhew, Lezberg and Patton, the accreditation process can provide us with the guidance for assuring quality in prior learning assessment programs. Teams are tailored to the institution. If prior learning assessment figures relatively prominently in an institution, it is likely that at least one team member will have some expertise in that area. As such, an accreditation review is an opportunity to learn from external "consultants."

Over the past twenty years, we have learned the importance of granting credit for knowledge, and not experience; that knowledge should be assessed by subject matter experts; that our criteria should be clear and described in writing; and much more. As more institutions begin to implement prior learning assessment programs, and others continue to refine theirs, standards become of the utmost importance. This is the basis on which the National Institute on the Assessment of Experiential Learning was founded: for the purpose of preserving and promoting excellence in prior learning assessment.

Debra A. Dagavarian

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